

## Rep. Henry Waxman announces retirement from Congress (Updated)

KPCC staff | January 30th, 2014, 3:24pm



CHRIS KLEPONIS/AFP/Getty Images

In this file photo, Representative Henry Waxman arrives for a meeting with House Democrats on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, March 20, 2010. Waxman announced Thursday that he will be retiring from Congress.

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) announced Thursday that he will not seek reelection to the House this fall.

"In 1974, I announced my first campaign for Congress. Today, I am announcing that I have run my last campaign," Waxman said in a statement (see below). "I will not seek reelection to the Congress and will leave after 40 years in office at the end of this year."

Appearing on KPCC's Take Two, Waxman said, "This is a good moment to turn the job over to somebody younger who could develop seniority, take on the task of carrying on some of the fights that I have been involved in and are important to our community in Los Angeles."

**RELATED: Rep. Henry Waxman speaks with KPCC's "Take Two" on his retirement** (<http://www.scpr.org/programs/take-two/2014/01/30/35800/rep-henry-waxman-on-his-retirement-announcement/>)

**During his long tenure in Congress, Waxman, 74, influenced policy on countless important issues — from telecom to tobacco.** (<http://www.scpr.org/blogs/politics/2014/01/31/15743/the-power-of-henry-waxman-s-gavel-and-questions/>) Paul Song, executive chairman of the California-based Courage Campaign, noted Waxman's role in "writing some of the nation's first clean air laws, prosecuting the tobacco industry for deceptive practices, [and] helping to write and pass the Affordable Care Act."

Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, a senior fellow at USC's Price School of Public Policy, said Waxman's announcement was "totally out of left field."

She said for a long time, Waxman "loved what he was doing." But, noting that House Democrats are likely to remain in the minority next year, she added, if you look at "where Henry was in terms of power, his ability to move legislation, it's less of a surprise."

Waxman echoed those sentiments in his Take Two interview. "We're going through a difficult time now in Congress," he said. "It's quite dysfunctional, because the Tea Party Republican extremists have taken over, and their view is compromise is a dirty word."

"The Republicans at the moment want to say no to everything that President Obama wants, just because it's Obama. That doesn't make sense to me. It's unfortunate."

Waxman's announcement caught at least the spokesman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee by surprise. As to who might be the Democratic candidate on the ballot in the 33rd district, Matt Inzeo said, "We're still figuring it out." But he predicted it will be a long ballot and an expensive race. "There's 40 years of pent-up ambition," he said, "and all the money in the world."

**RELATED: Reactions to Waxman's announcement** (<http://projects.scp.org/static/charts/reaction-to-henry-waxmans-retirement/>)

L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, a longtime friend of Waxman's, said in a statement that he was "stunned and saddened to hear the news from Henry on his intended retirement." The two have "worked together on veterans issues [and] health programs," Yaroslavsky said, and it's been a "long, close political" relationship. "It really is the end of an era." He called Waxman "one of his closest allies in Southern California politics for many decades."

Yaroslavsky, who is termed out from his county seat this year, told KPCC's Larry Mantle that he hasn't had time to think about running for Waxman's seat.

"My main concern is that I want this seat to remain in the hands of progressive Democratic representation," Yaroslavsky said. "If we can't elect a progressive Democrat from this district, then we're in trouble."

Waxman's decision is sure to set off a scrum of possible candidates for the Westside seat that is safely Democratic. In his statement, Waxman said he would prefer a successor "who is young enough to make the long-term commitment that's required for real legislative success."

Speculation was rampant in L.A. political circles Thursday morning. Two names that came up were former state legislator Sheila Kuehl and former Santa Monica city councilman and mayor Bobby Shriver, who are running for Yaroslavsky's county supervisor seat. But both candidates said Thursday morning that they are sticking with their plans.

State Senator Ted Lieu of Torrance is considering a run. Lieu, whose senate district includes more than 80 percent of Waxman's, said he will announce his intentions on Friday.

State Assemblyman and former Santa Monica mayor Richard Bloom also said Thursday that he is considering a run for Waxman's seat.

Another name that surfaced is attorney and women's rights activist Sandra Fluke. "I'm flattered that I'm being discussed as a potential candidate," she told KPCC. "A number of folks I respect very deeply have reached out today and encouraged me to run. I am strongly considering running."

Fluke, 32, became known in 2012 when — as a Georgetown University law student — she testified on Capitol Hill that insurers should provide no-cost contraception. Conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh later called her a "slut" and a "prostitute" on air, triggering a media firestorm. Fluke, who grew up in Pennsylvania, has only lived in L.A. since finishing law school.

New Age author and self-help spiritual guru Marianne Williamson had previously announced her run for Waxman's seat as an independent. She posted a statement on her website that says: "I congratulate Congressman Waxman for his years of outstanding service in the United States Congress. He has made his mark in areas ranging from public health to the environment to consumer protection, and I join many around the country today in expressing my respect."

Also in the race is Brent Roske, producer of the web series "Chasing the Hill," which is about a fictional candidate from California running for Congress. Roske is running as an independent.

In his last election, Waxman defeated businessman Bill Bloomfield by 54-46 percent. Bloomfield, a former Republican, ran as an independent and spent \$6 million of his own money on the race. The district, which runs along the coast from Malibu to Manhattan Beach, was redrawn before the 2012 election.

Oregon Congressman Greg Walden, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said Waxman's heavily-Democratic district hasn't attracted any GOP candidates, at least "not at this point." Speaking at the Republican House retreat in Maryland, Walden added that California's so-called "jungle primary" — in which the top two primary candidates advance to the runoff regardless of party — presents "some peculiarities that can play out." Walden said the NRCC will take a second look at the seat now that the incumbent won't be on the ballot.

Waxman's departure is the latest in a string of senior members of Congress from California who are leaving after this term, including "Buck" McKeon of Simi Valley, George Miller of the Bay Area and John Campbell of Irvine.

California Congresswoman and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi released the following statement about her colleague:

"For the past four decades, Congressman Henry Waxman's name has been synonymous with responsible action, extraordinary legislative skill, passionate public service, and bold leadership on behalf of Los Angeles, California, and the American people."

Read Waxman's full statement on his departure below:

"In 1974, I announced my first campaign for Congress. Today, I am announcing that I have run my last campaign. I will not seek reelection to the Congress and will leave after 40 years in office at the end of this year.

"As I reflect on my career, I am filled with gratitude. I am grateful for the support of my constituents, who have entrusted me to represent them and encouraged me to become a leader on national and international issues. I am grateful for my supporters and allies, who have worked side-by-side with me to fight for issues we care about: health, environmental protection, women's and gay rights, and strengthening the ties between the United States and our most important ally, the State of Israel.

"I am grateful for the friendship of my colleagues in Congress on both sides of the aisle. And I am honored that I served under the leadership of my friend, Nancy Pelosi, the first female Leader and Speaker of the House.

"I have long believed that a member of Congress is only as effective as his or her staff. I have been lucky to have a brilliant and committed staff who have labored tirelessly for me and the public good. I thank them deeply.

"And most of all, I want to thank my family. My wife Janet has supported me, cared for me, and made my life a blessing for over 40 years. And my children, Shai and Michael, and my grandchildren have given my life purpose and meaning.

"I first ran for office because I believe government can be a force for good in people's lives. I have held this view throughout my career in Congress. And I will leave the House of Representatives with my conviction intact. I have learned that progress is not always easy. It can take years of dedication and struggle. But it's worth fighting for.

"My parents were scarred by the Great Depression and as a result they were ardent Democrats. They believed in the ideals of this wonderful country and made sure that I had the opportunity to be the first in the family to get a college education. They taught me that the special interests have plenty of advocates; it's the poor, the sick, and the powerless who need a champion in Congress. And that's what I've strived to be.

"I take pride in my legislative accomplishments.

"I took on the pharmaceutical companies that did not want competition and joined with Senator Orrin Hatch to write the law that created the generic drug industry, saving families over \$1 trillion in the last decade alone. My orphan drug legislation led to treatments for hundreds of rare diseases.

"My investigations into the tobacco industry called the CEOs to account and exposed the industry's duplicity. After more than a decade of effort, President Obama signed into law my legislation to give FDA jurisdiction over tobacco products.

I held hearings to expose flagrant abuses in nursing homes and passed legislation to protect nursing home residents and create a resident's 'Bill of Rights.' And I spoke out early to raise public awareness about HIV/AIDS, holding over 30 hearings to draw attention to a disease no one wanted to discuss. These efforts culminated in the passage of the Ryan White CARE Act, the law that provides medical care and services to Americans living with HIV/AIDS.

"To protect consumers, I wrote three major food safety laws. The first law created the nutrition labels that millions of families rely on every day. The second removed dangerous pesticides from fruits and vegetables. And the third will help make imported food safer.

"Expanding health coverage to those in need has been one of my driving passions. In the 1980s, I led the fight to expand Medicaid, providing health coverage to millions of low-income children, pregnant women, and seniors. In the 1990s, I worked with Senator Ted Kennedy to provide coverage to the children of working families through the Children's Health Insurance Program.

"And in 2010, when I was chair of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, one of my lifelong dreams was finally achieved: Congress passed the Affordable Care Act, which guarantees access to affordable health coverage to all Americans.

"I've also worked throughout my career to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship. I have traveled to Israel on numerous occasions and will never forget the times Janet and I were there to greet President Sadat of Egypt and to see the arrival of the airlift carrying Ethiopian refugees. I fought for the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate and took great satisfaction in seeing Refuseniks that I had met in the former Soviet Union achieve their dream of living in the Jewish State of Israel. I authored the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program for scientific exchanges between the U.S., Israel, and the Arab countries. And it is with pride that I have seen my daughter thrive in Israel and my grandchildren serve in the Israeli army.

"In perhaps no area have the special interests held more sway than environmental policy, and I have battled them to protect clean air and safe drinking water throughout my career. It took a decade of effort to pass the landmark Clean Air Act of 1990, but the controls on urban smog, toxic air pollution, acid rain, and ozone-depleting chemicals have saved lives and vastly improved our air quality.

"In recent years, I have been leading the fight in Congress for limits on the carbon pollution that is causing global climate change. In 2009, I joined with now Senator Ed Markey to pass the Waxman-Markey climate bill through the House. Last Congress, I formed a Safe Climate Caucus in the House and a Bicameral Task Force with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse to build public support for the effort to protect our fragile atmosphere for our children and grandchildren.

"Even if Congress won't act on climate, President Obama can. The President has laid out a plan to reduce emissions by 17% by 2020, the goal we set in the House legislation. And he is working with other nations to set an ambitious target for post-2020 reductions. Whether Congress acts or not, the Clean Air Act gives President Obama – and future Presidents – ample authority to achieve these emission reductions.

"Most of the public thinks of Congress as a legislative body. But Congress can also serve the public through oversight. The investigations I led on the Oversight Committee with Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican, identified procurement abuses that cost taxpayers billions of dollars, especially in Iraq. Our hearings on steroids in baseball prompted reforms that cut steroid use by teens in half and pushed all sports leagues to strengthen their drug policies. We also held hearings to reveal the causes of the mortgage meltdown and Wall Street crash.

"When I was first elected to the House – in 1974 – I hoped to be able to serve 20 years and leave a mark on some important issues. I never imagined I would be in the House for 40 years and be able to advance every issue I care deeply about. But in what feels like a blink of an eye, it has been 40 years and I've devoted most of my life to the House of Representatives.

"It has been an extraordinary experience. The House is a remarkable institution and it is an honor to have a chance – every day – to make a difference

in the lives of my constituents and families across our country.

"I want to add a few comments about my decision.

"There are elements of Congress today that I do not like. I abhor the extremism of the Tea Party Republicans. I am embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts, and ignoring facts.

"But I am not leaving out of frustration with Congress. Even in today's environment, there are opportunities to make real progress. Last Congress, I worked with Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate to pass legislation that will ease the nation's growing spectrum shortage, spur innovation in new 'Super WiFi' technologies, and create a national broadband network for first responders. Just last year, I worked on a bipartisan basis to enact legislation strengthening FDA's authority to stop dangerous drug compounding and to track pharmaceuticals through the supply chain.

"And I am not leaving because I think House Democrats have no chance to retake the House. House Republicans have no compelling vision for the future. The public understands this, and I am confident that the Democrats can regain control of the House.

"The reason for my decision is simple. After 40 years in Congress, it's time for someone else to have the chance to make his or her mark, ideally someone who is young enough to make the long-term commitment that's required for real legislative success. I still feel youthful and energetic, but I recognize if I want to experience a life outside of Congress, I need to start soon. Public office is not the only way to serve, and I want to explore other avenues while I still can.

"I have had a long career and an eventful one – and I wouldn't trade any of it. I woke each day looking forward to opportunities to make our country stronger, healthier, and fairer. And I will always be grateful for this honor and privilege."

*This story has been updated.*

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